



FAMILY-STYLE MEALS

Create enjoyable mealtimes that support healthy habits and promote independence!

Family-style meal service:

- Allows children to serve themselves at the table.
- Encourages caregivers to sit and eat with the children.
- Focuses on creating a cheerful, conversational environment.



The Benefits

- Improves motor skills such as serving, scooping, and pouring.
- Builds self-confidence and independence.
- Teaches social skills such as sharing and table conversation.
- Encourages good table manners.
- Helps children learn portion sizes based on their hunger and fullness.

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What concerns prevent caregivers from serving family-style meals?

CONFUSION

Providers are concerned that children will not understand family-style meals.

- Explain to the children beforehand what to expect and use the same daily routine.
- You may even want to practice with the children before meal times.
- Serve as a role model to help children learn how family-style meals work.

CLEANLINESS

Providers are concerned that children will spread germs.

- Make sure children wash their hands well before meal and snack times.
- Provide serving utensils that are appropriate for small hands.
- Encourage children to practice scooping and pouring outside of mealtimes.
- Some accidents are expected. Prepare for messes by having paper towels nearby.

PORTION SIZES

Providers are concerned that children will take too much or too little food.

- Encourage but do not force children to take some of each food offered. Provide at least the minimum portion required by the Child and Adult Care Food Program.
- Provide child-size serving dishes, plates, cups, serving utensils, and eating utensils.
- Concerns about portion-sizes usually decreases as children get used to family-style.
- Work one-on-one with children who consistently take too much or too little food.

CHILDREN ARE TOO YOUNG

Providers are concerned that children are too young to serve themselves.

- Adapt mealtimes based on the age of the children in your care.
- As children are ready to serve themselves, start with easier things such as serving a piece of bread. Help them increase the number of foods they serve themselves over time.
- Sit closer to children who may need more assistance.